



Gov. Henry Sends Oklahoma National Guard Troops To Assist Mexican Border Enforcement Efforts

Oklahoma City – Governor Brad Henry has signed orders to send Oklahoma National Guard Troops to the U.S.-Mexico border to assist federal authorities with border enforcement efforts there. Oklahoma is one of several states that have volunteered to participate in President Bush's new border enforcement program.

"We have to secure our borders and beef up enforcement to protect our country, particularly in the post 9-11 world," said Gov. Henry. "I'm proud to send Oklahoma troops to assist President Bush with his efforts to improve border enforcement and stop the flow of illegal immigrants. Oklahoma is more than willing to do its part when it comes to addressing our nation's border security issues."

Late Thursday, the Governor signed a memorandum of agreement with the U.S. Department of Defense to send Oklahoma Guard troops and equipment to New Mexico and western Texas to support border enforcement efforts in that area. More than 300 Oklahoma troops are scheduled to take part in the mission over the next three months.

Oklahoma Army and Air Guard soldiers will conduct ground and aerial surveillance to help locate illegal immigrants and assist with construction of fences and other structures designed to improve border enforcement. The state will also dispatch several Black Hawk helicopters to help carry out the mission.

The first Oklahoma troops will leave for the border on Saturday, July 8. The 138th Civil Engineering Squadron, Oklahoma Air National Guard in Tulsa will send 20 members initially. The other Oklahoma Army National Guard units scheduled to participate in the border enforcement mission are the 285th Aviation Company from Tulsa, the 45th Field Artillery Brigade and the 120th Engineer Battalion. Each unit will deploy for three weeks to support the border effort before returning home.

"We stand ready to serve as long as we are needed to assist with border security," Gov. Henry said. "The Oklahoma National Guard has been at the forefront of responding to national crises. Our brave troops were exemplary assisting with recovery and rescue efforts in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and I am confident they will be just as outstanding in this critical mission of helping to secure our border."

While the Oklahoma Guard units will be assigned to the New Mexico Guard command structure, Gov. Henry and State Adjutant General Harry "Bud" Wyatt will determine the length of the deployment and have the authority to call the troops back at anytime to deal with any emergency in Oklahoma.

Maj. Gen. Wyatt said there will be adequate troops on hand in Oklahoma to address any emergencies.

"The National Guard stands ready to respond quickly and decisively in the event of an emergency in the state of Oklahoma," said the adjutant general. "Even with Guard troops currently serving overseas and those who will take part in this border security operation, the National Guard presence in Oklahoma is not compromised."

In May, President Bush announced a border security initiative that included sending up to 6,000 National Guard members to assist in patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border.